open wide our hearts
the enduring call to love *a pastoral letter against racism*

Grade 1 Activity:
Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton Story

Doctrinal Elements:
Man's Vocation: Life in the Spirit

- The dignity of the human person comes from being created in the image and likeness of God. (**CCC 1700**)
- The image of God is present in every person. (**CCC 1702**)

"Racism directly places brother and sister against each other, violating the dignity inherent in each person."

– *U.S. bishops,* Open Wide Our Hearts

Objectives

Students should be able to:

1. Understand that loving our neighbor, even when it might be hard or inconvenient, is loving God.
2. Identify the diversity of our world as good and special.
3. Know the story of Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton.

Quotes from *Open Wide our Hearts*

- "Christ heals all divisions, including those that are at the core of racism."
- "We can also draw upon the incredible diversity of the Church worldwide in providing education within the family, and make clear that God dwells in the equal dignity of each person."
- "This command of love can never be simply 'live and let others be.' The command of love requires us to make room for others in our hearts. It means that we are indeed our brother's keeper (see Gn 4:9)."

- "It is the love of Christ that binds together the Church, and this love reaches out beyond the Church to all peoples."

- "Racism occurs because a person ignores the fundamental truth that, because all humans share a common origin, they are all brothers and sisters, all equally made in the image of God."

Instructions for the Lesson

Start with the following prayer:

Children's Prayer: We Are All in God's Image

Loving Father,

Thank you for the many beautiful colors
and languages of the world
and for making all your children unique.

Thank you for creating me in your image.
Thank you for loving me and making me wonderful.
Help me to love like you.

Help me to share your love
with all the children you have made,
for they are unique and wonderful.

Amen.

Next, talk with the students about their families:

- God gave us families and communities to show how much he loves us and for us to show how much we love God. We believe that God is present in our families and our communities. Tell me one special thing about your family or neighborhood.
- All families are part of God's family. We come from different places, we have different ways of celebrating, and we have different abilities and gifts. God loves the unique things that make our families different. But sometimes, those differences have been used to treat others differently or unfairly.

Then, read the story of Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton, who is on the path to sainthood.

- Today we are going to read the story of one very holy man who was treated differently because of his skin color. But he knew he was loved by God and continued

to listen to God's call in his life, even when others didn't listen to him and did not want to be near him.

Read the story below of Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton or a book with a similar story about a person who was treated poorly because of the color of his or her skin.

- To help the students stay engaged, bring pictures of Venerable Fr. Tolton and a map that shows how far apart Illinois and Italy are. Ask the students to move the picture of Venerable Fr. Tolton from Illinois to Italy and back at the appropriate time in the story.

Here's the story of Venerable Fr. Augustus Tolton:

Many people believe that Fr. Augustus Tolton was the first black Catholic priest in the U.S. Augustus was born into slavery. His mom and dad were Catholic. Augustus, his mother, and three brothers and sisters escaped to the North where they could live as free people. This is how Augustus became free.

When he was a still a young boy, Augustus felt called to serve the Church and others. A priest at his church saw that Augustus might make a good priest. But none of the schools for priests, called seminaries, would let him study there because he was Black. He had to go all the way to Italy so he could become a priest. Even though he was a good priest, some people did not like him just because of his skin color.

[Pause here and ask: When he had to go to Italy, how do you think he got there? You may wish to use a printed map and a boat and ask a child to move the boat from Illinois to Italy.]

After he finished going to school, Augustus was ordained and became Fr. Augustus. It was a great day for the Church!

Fr. Augustus knew that God wanted him to be a priest. So, even though many tried to stop him, he kept trying. He showed people he loved God every day. He was a great speaker and was very generous.

Fr. Augustus wanted to make sure all children had the ability to go to school. He helped raise money for the parish school. Some people would not let Fr. Augustus stay and made him leave that town because they did not like that he was Black.

Many people would have given up, but not Fr. Augustus. He felt God calling him to be a priest and he found a new home in Chicago, where he dedicated his ministry to serving the poor. He is a great example of serving God every day by helping others, even when it seems difficult. Fr. Augustus trusted in God and served the Church wherever he could.

Now discuss the story with the students using these or similar questions:

- How was Fr. Augustus treated by the people around him and the Church?
- Why did people treat Fr. Augustus differently?
- Did you know that sometimes people still treat others differently based on their skin color? Have you ever had that experience?
- What would you say to someone who was treating someone else poorly because of their skin color?

Summary and Final Activity:

We need to celebrate the things that make us all different. God makes each of us different and special. Those differences are meant to show us and the world how much God loves us.

- Ask the students to draw a picture of Fr. Augustus and write down one thing he did for the Church, even though many people treated him poorly because of his skin color.
- Ask the students to draw a picture of something that makes each student special that he or she want to share with the class.

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